Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

1944

To commemorate Nietzsche on the occasion of his hundredth anniversary is both easy and difficult. It is easy because one cannot but remember him as the prophet of our century. He is more alive in 1944 than he was in 1888 when he suddenly burned out like a volcano after the last eruption, called *Ecce Home*. He knew every recess of the modern soul, its widest periphery and its hidden center. His problems are our problems and his predicament is our own. For this very reason it is also difficult to commemorate him. He is still becoming what he is, and one cannot but hesitate to sum up his final significance in the history of Western man and the Christian Occident.

I

Nietzsche's various influences are so great and still growing that one can hardly discriminate between his influence and his thought. It seems as if his work were almost absorbed by its influence upon many different men and movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He impressed, first of all, one of his most congenial followers, Gabriele d'Annunzio, and through him many an Italian youth[1]. In France he evoked the profound sympathy of André Gide[2], and in Germany he became to the followers of Stefan George[3], the supreme judge of the nineteenth century. He gave the basic inspiration to men like R. Pann-

1 See G. d'Annunzio's poem *Per la Morte di un Distruttore.*

2 See A. Gide's letter to Angèle in *Jahrbuch der Nietzsche-Gesellschaft,* 1925.

3 E. Bertram, *Nietzsche* (Berlin 1918), and K. Hildebrandt, *Wagner and Nietzsche,* (Breslau 1924).

witz, Oswald Spengler, Thomas Mann, who said in a commemoration of 1924 that whoever believes in a European future swears by the name of Nietzsche. He determined the thought of L. Klages, A. Baeumler, and E. Jünger, and he became, last but not least, the supreme authority of that German youth which is now fighting all over Europe. To Nietzsche we owe more than to anyone else that change in the intellectual climate and the very feeling which followed the end of the *»fin de siècle«*. There are few Europeans who are not – consciously or unconsciously, by attraction or repulsion – post-Nietzschean in their way of feeling and thinking. That is true at least for the Germans, French, and Italians.

He had a remarkably small and sporadic influence in England and America. His passionate radicalism and superstyle probably could not appeal to the temper, the common sense, and the political wisdom of the English race. I know only one very fascinating exception, T. E. Lawrence, whose passionate soul was as ambitious and ascetic, ruthless and scrupulous, austere and refined, triumphant and desperate, as that of Nietzsche. Among the choice books which Lawrence kept at his cottage were Nietzsche's *The Joyful Wisdom, The Twilight of the Idols, The Antichrist* and *Zarathustra.* In his letters he refers several times to *Zarathustra, The Brothers Karamazov, Moby Dick, War and Peace,* and *Don Quixote* as »the five titanic books« to which *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* should add one more. Apart from such an exceptional man as Lawrence, the English mind had no affinity to Nietzsche, and therefore little understanding of the intellectual background which prepared Germany for its desperate stroke.

At this point it is inevitable to enter into the intricate question of Nietzsche's political responsibility. »Responsibility« has always two sides: the responsibility of those who challenge and intend something, and the responsibility of those who respond. Between the intellecutal challenge of the former and the political response of the latter, there is no simple correspondence or equation. Usually it is, however, the secondary response to, and the practical application on, an original thought which is reflected upon the latter, making it subsequently responsible for the response, though its real effectiveness is due to its intellectual power of anticipation. Men of insight and vision realize the real issues long before they become realities, and if once the realm of spirit is revolutionized, even reality cannot resist. The great revolutionary thinkers were all far ahead of their time, thereby *»unzeitgemäß«* in their own time, and relevant for future generations. They created the

intellectual climate in which alone certain things became possible[4]. Thus Nietzsche created what one might call Nietzscheanism, i.e., a most radical form of German »Protestantism«. I see no reason to deny to Nietzsche's ideas their historic effectiveness and insofar also their political responsibility. It is the privilege of great individuals to become guilty in history.

But even if we grant that Nietzsche's philosophical ideas – concerning Christianity and democracy, morals and politics – prepared the way for the European upheaval, is he also responsible for the ideology of the Nazis? Professor Crane Brinton[5] has tried to answer this question by confronting the official Nietzsche-interpretations of Nazi-writers with Nietzsche himself. The unsatisfactory result of his study is that a great deal of Nietzche's thinking fits perfectly well into the ideology of the Nazis, and a great deal does not fit at all. Brinton evades a decision whether the former or the latter half of Nietzsche, or neither of them, is the real one by saying that if there really was a true Nietzsche, he is gone, and what lives after him are only many different selective interpretations by »gentle« and »tough« Nietzscheans. I do not think that Brinton's brilliant common sense affords any insight into the problem of Nietzsche's historic significance. He underestimates not only Nietzsche, who is to him no more than an ambitious German professor who went beyond good and evil but not beyond Mussolini and Hitler, but also the Nazis. For who are the »Nazis« for whose ideology Nietzsche is supposed to be largely responsible? And what is the connecting link between Nietzsche and the Nazis? To answer this question I propose to neglect for a moment the artificial distinction between one abstraction called Nietzsche and another called Nazis, and to realize the simple but fundamental fact that both are Germans! I do not believe in the fashionable discrimination between two Germanies, the one from Frederick the Great to Bismarck and Hitler, and the other from Goethe to Nietzsche and Thomas Mann. This distinction forgets that Goethe had much admiration for Frederick, Nietzsche for Goethe and Frederick, and Thomas Mann for Frederick, Goethe, and Nietzsche alike.

4 Carl Mayer's article *On the intellectual origin of National Socialism, Social Research* (May 1942); and the recent discussion of L. Spitzer and A. Lovejoy on *Geistesgeschichte vs. History of Ideas as Applied to Hitlerism, Journal of the History of Ideas* (April 1944).

5 Crane Brinton, *Nietzsche* (Cambridge/Mass., 1941), 200 ff.

Only wishful thinking believes in the »other Germany« and not in the authentic one. There are everywhere conflicts and oppositions within the same nation, but there ist no other Germany, just as there is no other France, though she is divided. The best that is in every country is of that country as the worst is. Germany has produced Luther as well as Dürer, Frederick as well as Lessing, Bismarck as well as Nietzsche, Hitler as well as Heidegger. What is peculiar, however, to German philosophy from Kant to Nietzsche is its radicalism, the courage to dig remorselessly for the roots of things and to draw the ultimate conclusions. Nobody realized better than Nietzsche himself that it was the »magic of the extreme« which was fighting for him. »We do not need any allies, not even lies, for we seduce by the mere force of being extreme.« Ruthlessness of intellect can be admirable and even most moral, while ruthlessness of character and action is detestable. Both are, however, peculiar to the Germans, for they are radical even in the practical application of abstract principles. And that is the point where Nietzsche and the Germans came to agree with each other. The transition, however, from Nietzsche's philosophical design to its political application, which necessarily implies distortion and simplification, was neither in the hands of the designer nor in that of the builders. Such a process is effected by history which always embraces both: thinkers as well as actors, promoters as well as opponents, conformists as well as objectors, all together responsible for what they intended, and not responsible for what they achieved, for the ways by which ideas as well as actions become historically effective are unpredictable and beyond our intentions. Granted that Nietzsche prepared the way for the German revolution, one must also grant him that all path-makers prepared the way for others, just because they did not walk that way themselves.

The endeavor to discharge Nietzsche from the guilt of his historic effectiveness is as futile as the opposite attempt to charge him with direct responsibility. The former is done by those »gentle« Nietzscheans who liked him before 1933 without realizing, however, his deepest implications, and who are now unwilling to risk disappointment by re-examining their old loyalty. The latter ist done by those who discovered in the German revolution the dynamite of Nietzsche's writings, but who do not understand that history achieves always more and less than what has been intended by its prophets. Thus Rousseau prepared the way for the French Revolution, just as Nietzsche prepared the German counter-revolution against the ideals of the first. Neither of

them would recognize his ideas in Robespierre and Himmler, respectively. It is true that Nietzsche interpreted the »will to truth« as a »will to power«, but he also warned his readers that the *Will to Power* is a book »exclusively for thinking«. The Germans, he adds, have however unlearned to think, being now so much impressed by their military and industrial achievements; only as a political principle would the will to power be intelligible to them[6].

In his reflections concerning the twentieth century, Nietzsche quotes from Galiani the following passage: »*La prévoyance est la cause des guerres actuelles de l'Europe. Si l'on voulait se donner la peine de ne rien prévoir, tout le monde serait tranquille.*« Upon this Nietzsche comments: »As I in no way share the unwarlike views of my friend Galiani, I have no fear whatever of foretelling something, and thereby possibly causing in some way future wars.« What did Nietzsche foretell and thereby suggest as a possibility? No more and no less than our world-war revolution. A few quotations may show the crescendo of Nietzsche's understanding of Europe's condition and of his own task in regard to it.

In 1874 he described the situation thus: the decay of all contemplation and simplicity, the increasing hurry of life, accelerate the complete uprooting of all culture. The waters of religion are ebbing and dirty swamps are left behind. All possibilities of a Christian life are now tried out, the most costly as well as the cheapest ones. Even mockery, cynicism, and hostility toward Christianity have been played out to the end. It seems as if it were time to invent something new, but it will be difficult to find the way out. The sciences blindly drive along on a *laissez-faire* system without a common standard. They are splitting up and losing hold of every firm principle. The educated classes are swept along in the contemptible struggle for wealth. Never was the world more worldly, never poorer in love. Everything bows before the coming barbarism, art and science included. There is certainly enormous strength, but it is wild and merciless. For a century, i. e., since the French Revolution, we have been readly for a word-shaking convulsion, and though we have lately been trying to set the strength of the »National State« against the great modern tendency toward volcanic destruction, this modern state itself will for a long time remain an aggravation of the universal unrest. Nowadays affairs are directed by fools and knaves –

6 *Werke* (Oktav-Ausgabe) XIV, 420.

the selfishness of the money-makers and the brute force of the militarists. In their hands the state makes a good show of reorganizing everything and of becoming the only bond that unites the warring elements. We shall come to feel the consequences.[7]

About ten years later Nietzsche had made up his mind as to the inevitability of the European catastrophe which he neither wished to promote nor to prevent, but to make transparent in its deeper significance by analyzing its antecedents and its potentialities. In the last chapter of *Ecce Homo* (»Why I am a Fatality«), we read: »There will come a day when my name will recall the memory of something formidable, a crisis the like of which has never been known on earth, the memory of the most profound clash of consciences, and the passing of a sentence upon all that which theretofore had been believed. [...] Shocks are bound to ensue and a spell of earthquakes, followed by the transposition of hills and valleys, such as the world has never yet imagined even in its dreams. The concept ›politics‹ then becomes elevated to the sphere of spiritual warfare. All the mighty realms of the ancient order of society are blown into space [...] There will be wars the like of which have never been seen on earth before. Only from my time and after me will politics on a large scale exist on earth.«

Similarly, he describes the history of the twentieth century in the preface to *The Will to Power* as the »triumph of Nihilism« which is the »logic of decadence«. Out of it comes, however, a new order of life. Its political aspect is the unification of Europe and its mastery over the globe. In order to force Europe into his »long-range policy«, Europe must overcome its nihilism by forming again a decisive and purposeful whole, beating out a new order of life. Nihilism, this infirmity of the will, is at its worst where civilization has longest prevailed, as in France. It decreases where the barbarian still or again asserts his claims under the drapery of Western civilization, as in Russia and Germany. The more threatening the attitude of Russia becomes, the more will Europe have to become equally threatening by acquiring *one* will by means of a ruling caste that can set its aims thousands of years ahead and drill the democratic masses for its purpose. The time of petty-states is over. The twentieth century, Nietzsche prophesied, will bring the compulsion to great imperialistic politics for the dominion of the globe. To this end, Germany will have to strive for an »agreement« with England, »for

7 *Thoughts Out of Season,* III, paragraph 4; and *Werke,* X, 289.

nobody believes any longer that England will be strong enough to keep playing her old role even for fifty years more«. Nowadays one must be a soldier first lest one loses one's credit as a merchant. The next century will be seen following in the footsteps of Napoleon, the most anticipating personality of modern times. The standing armies, permanent since the Napoleonic wars, are but the first sign of Europe's new military development. Personal, virile, and physical capacity recovers its value, valuations become more physical. Beautiful men have once more become possible, bloodless snakes are a matter of the past. The savage in everyone of us is acknowledged. A master-race can grow up from terrible and violent beginnings only. The problem is: »where are the barbarians of the twentieth century?« It will be those elements which are capable of the longest and strongest will[8]. Nietzsche's faith in the future of Europe lies in its increasing virility. The first step toward this movement we owe to Napoleon who first wanted Europe to be one and mistress of the globe. Having entered into »the classical age of war«, which will be at the same time scientific and popular, we shall need many brave pioneers now. They must be silent, solitary, and resolute men, content and persistent in invisible activity, accustomed to command with perfect assurance, and equally ready to obey, men more imperilled, productive and happy, for the secret of realizing the greatest enjoyment of existence is to live in danger[9]. That is why Nietzsche is dangerous.

II

This political program is not at the periphery of Nietzsche's philosophy but rooted in its center. But what is his philosophy? Is it really only a conglomerate of arbitrary selections of Nietzsche? Taken apart from their context one can find in Nietzsche's thousands of aphorisms whatever one wishes: passages, e.g., on race-discipline and marriage which could make him a leader of Nazi education; and other passages on the Reich of Bismarck and the character of the Germans, which would make him disappear in a concentration camp. Often these apparent

8 *The Will to Power,* paragraph 900 ff, 1053 ff, 127 f; *Beyond Good and Evil,* paragraph 208; *Werke,* XIII, 358; XI, 373 ff.
9 *The Joyful Wisdom,* paragraph 362 and 283.

contradictions can be explained by considering their polemic implications, but sometimes they cannot be reconciled. Studied as a whole it is, however, evident that Nietzsche's thought, despite its bewildering richness, is almost monotonous, like every philosophic system which originates from one basic experience and drives at one definite aim. Nietzsche's basic experience was the devaluation of all our values, his aim was the »transvaluation of all values« which is the subtitle of *The Will to Power*. The devaluation originates in the last analysis from the death of God, the transvaluation aims at the restoration of the classic values, symbolized in the pagan god Dionysos. Between the death of the Christian God and the rebirth of Dionysos, Europe is in the state of nihilism, i.e., of social and political, moral and spiritual dissolution, where »nothing is true and everything is allowed«. This nihilism has two phases: it is at first a nihilism of weakness, of weariness and morbidity (calles »pessimism«), and is now to develop into a resolute nihilism of strength which prefers »to will nothingness to not be willing at all«. Hence the whole system of Nietzsche's thought can be summed up in the three basic concepts: the death of God, nihilism, will to power. Since I may assume that everyone of us has a certain experience of what Nietzsche called nihilism[10], I will explain only the first and the third concept.

It is characteristic of Nietzsche that he dealt with the death of God first in his *Joyful Wisdom*, though he realized the frightful implications of this event more than anyone else. »The most important of more recent events – that ›God is dead‹, begins to cast its first shadows over Europe.« Some old profound confidence seems to have changed into doubt. In the main, however, the event itself is far too great and too remote as to have already reached most people's power of apprehension. Only a few realize what really had taken place, and what must all collapse now that this belief had been undermined, because so much was built upon it and rested upon it – »for example, our entire European morality«. Nietzsche understood what has been forgotten since

10 A typical illustration of »Nihilism« in its irresolute form of weakness is the following passage from *The Education of Henry Adams:* »He very gravely doubted, from his aching consciousness of religious void, whether any large fraction of society cared for a future life, or even for the present one, thirty years hence. [...] For the old world of public men and measures since 1870 Adams wept no tears, he never saw anything to admire in it, or anything he wanted to save. Not an act, or an expression, or an image showed depth of faith and hope.«

Kant's reduction of religion to the limits of reason, that the Jewish Christian religion is not only an essentially moral religion, but also a religion the morality of which rests on a faith, which is now dead. Though the consequences of this event are more than gloomy, Nietzsche relates it in his *Joyful Wisdom* because »at last the horizon seems open once more«. The sea again lies open before those who like danger and risk[11].

The death of God by which life loses its traditional ballast and standard of evaluation means that we have to replace the faith in a purposeful will of God by our own will. The decay of our traditional values motivates the will to new values, to a new standard of evaluation. Thus the will to power is the »countermovement« to the devaluation of our values, a process which ultimately derives from the death of the Christian God. This new will to power is a »self-conquest« of nihilism, for it cannot come except out of it. Zarathustra is »the victor over God and Nothingness«, i.e., the absence of aim or purpose consequent upon the death of God. The will of man, emancipated from any transcendent »Thou shalt«, must learn to command itself[12]. For this a superlative energy and discipline is required: a will to power.

The will to power is in Nietzsche's philosophy an ontological and therefore universal term interpreting the nature of every being[13]. It is not to be confined to the conscious individual will or to »power-politics« (if there is any other kind of politics) but it also does not exclude force and violence. The will to power covers the power of organic assimilation, of physical strength, vital energy, social ascendancy, and political mastery, as well as the power of moral strength, spiritual energy, and ascetic discipline. And since all kinds of external power over something, the capability of over-powering, are conditioned by intrinsic power, the most important power is self-mastery: the power to overcome oneself. The will to power manifests itself in overcoming resistances. Its general structure is everywhere the same: from the power of appropriating and assimilating in the protoplasm to the power of conquering and transforming a foreign country. The will to power is at the bottom of violence against others *and* of self-sacrifice,

11 *The Joyful Wisdom,* paragraph 343 and 125.

12 See Zarathustra's first speech on »The Three Metamorphoses«, i.e., from the Christian »Thou shalt« of The Camel, to the modern »I will« of the Lion, to the classic »I am« of the Child which has regained the innocence of cosmic being.

13 G. A. Morgan, *What Nietzsche Means* (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), 119 ff.

of hate *and* love, of revenge *and* charity. It is the basic character of »life« in its fullness, living in the tension between growth and decay, good and evil, truth and illusion. Life as will to power is creative by being also destructive – beyond the moral separation of good and evil, of war and peace. If we subtract, says Nietzsche, from the notion of God supreme goodness and wisdom, he still is supreme power, and that is enough, for from it follows everything: the basic character of the whole living world. Man is distinguished from this character of all nature not by nature but only by being conscious of it.

Nietzsche calls this world of will to power a »Dionysian world« of eternal self-creation and self-destruction. He describes it in terms similar to those which Goethe used in his Fragment on *Nature,* and Schelling in his *Ages of the World;* it is a monster of finite energy without beginning and end, a sea of sorces storming and raging in itself, forever changing and yet always the same, rolling back over incalculable ages to recurrences, producing the most complicated and contradictory forms out of the most simple structure, and then returning from multifariousness to uniformity, from the play of contradictions back into the delight of consonance, saying Yea unto itself, »and even ye yourselves are this will to power and nothing besides«. Man and his history are included in this cyclic world of eternal recurrences without aim, »unless there is an aim in the bliss of the circle – without will, unless a ring must by nature keep good will to itself«[14].

This world of the eternal recurrence of generation and corruption is in each of its manifestations equally powerful and equally valuable. It is not a created but an eternal world and as such as decidedly antichristian as the cyclic theory of the pagan philosophers whom the Fathers of the Church (Justin, Origen, Irenaeus, Augustine) tried to refute as incompatible with God's creation and with his unique revelation in Christ. The whole meaning of Nietzsche's philosophy is indeed expressed in the last sentence of *Ecce Homo:* »Dionysos against Christ«. When Nietzsche had finished *Ecce Homo,* he signed the manuscript: »Given on the first day of the year one (September 30, 1888, of the false chronology).«

How deep-rooted in Nietzsche's thinking this final perspective was may be seen from the fact that the alternative, either the Christian God or the Dionysian World, appears already in an autobiographical sketch

14 *The Will to Power,* paragraph 1067.

of 1863 when Nietzsche was nineteen years old. It begins with the statement: »As a plant I am born near the churchyard (Gottesacker), as a man in a pastorate,« and it ends with the question: »Thus man is outgrowing everything which once embraced him. But where is the Ring which at last will comprehend him? Is it the World? Is it God?« The introductory sentence is revealing, for Nietzsche's philosophy is indeed a Protestant event, like the whole German philosophy from Kant to Hegel and from Hegel to Nietzsche. Nobody knew this better than Nietzsche himself who wrote: »The Lutheran pastor is the grandfather of German philosophy, its *peccatum originale* is Protestantism.« The last sentence is no less revealing, for it shows how early Nietzsche felt the necessity of a decision between the Christian God and the ring of the cyclic world, between creation and eternal recurrence. Twenty years later, in *Zarathustra,* he had definitely decided that it is the world as a will to power which redeems our contingent existence, this casual *Ecce homo,* by re-integrating it again into the cosmos. The Christian ego which »since Copernicus fell from the center toward an X«, becomes again an integral part of the cosmos the God of which is Dionysos. Thus Nietzsche's final decision renews no more and no less than the secular decision between Christianity and paganism, and *that* »transvaluation« of all values which the founders of the Church had effected against the ancient world.

III

But when Nietzsche went mad, he signed some of his letters »Dionysos the Crucified«, confusing himself with the dismembered Dionysos Zagreus and with the crucified Christ. This double signature reveals not only an accidental confusion but an ultimate problem, the problem of Nietzsche's anti-christian Christianity. The first and even lasting impression which the reader of Nietzsche must have, is of course the decidedly anti-christian character of his philosophy. There cannot be the least doubt about the deadly sincerity of Nietzsche's most radical rejection of either the New Testament or of the most diluted form of social gospel. All attempts which have been made by liberal Protestants to use Nietzsche as a kind of tonic can be explained only by intellectual blindness or by very poor judgment. F. Overbeck knew better when he said that it is the most pathetic judgment upon modern Christianity that

no great man can stand up against Christianity without being claimed as a defender of it. A truly Christian interpretation of Nietzsche cannot but come to the conclusion of Vladimir Solovev: that Nietzsche was as alien to the faith in Christ as to that in the real Antichrist[15].

And yet this tells only half the story of Nietzsche's position against and within Christianity. It is not by chance that time and again attempts have been made by Christians to vindicate Nietzsche from the viewpoint of his potential Christianity, and the interesting point is that the more recent attempts of this kind are more consistent and persuasive than those by nineteenth century liberals[16]. There is not a little that can be said in favor of their thesis. First of all: Nietzsche was by his sheer passion for and concern with an *ultimate* truth, by which to live, more religious than most contemporary Christians. Even his scepsis has the ardor of faith. Concerned with the first and the last things he was more eschatological than the professional theologians who had quite forgotten that Christianity deals with an *eschaton*, and he was himself very conscious of his religious temper. »I have lived on purpose the whole contradiction of a religious nature. I know the devil's perspective for God.« Thus one can compare him with men like Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, but not with the theists and atheists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He was far away from the wit and the lucidity of Voltaire, from the shallowness of David Strauss' »new belief« in Darwin and civilization, and from the complacent atheism of Feuerbach who negated only the divine subject but kept all its predicates, like goodness, love, and justice. Nietzsche alone was a radical atheist who questioned the very value of our traditional values, the morality of our morals. In him alone the great suspicion arose whether such values as goodness, unselfishness, love, justice, peace, and happiness – in short all that constitutes our Christian humanity, are ultimate values at all. As a radical atheist he is a turning point in the history of mordern atheism. He longed for a new faith – from the early poem *To the unknown God* to the late Ariadne poem where he invokes again his unknown God as his »hangman and final happiness«. God, he says, was suffocated by

15 *Die geistigen Grundlagen des Lebens* (Jena 1914), 167ff.

16 E. Benz, *Nietzsches Ideen zur Geschichte des Christentums*, in: *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* (1937, Heft 2 and 3); J. Schor, *Deutschland auf dem Wege nach Damaskus* (Luzern 1934); Urs von Balthasar, *Die Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele* (München 1937), II.

theology, but he will reappear as a living power, transfigured as Dionysos. Even the will to power, he says, is still a »theodicy«, for though the philosophy of life and power does not need any justification of evil, it ends nevertheless with an unconditional Yea to this world as the most perfect being.

The only way to perfection is, however, through resistance and suffering – suffering not so much by passive endurance as by active conquest. The two great types of sufferers are the classic hero and the Christian saint, and it was Nietzsche's peculiar ambition to unite both in his ideal of a heroic selfsacrifice. Thus he discriminates between Dionysos and Christ not on account of their suffering, but in regard to the different meaning of it: whether a Christian or a tragic meaning be given to it. »In the first case suffering is the road to a holy mode of existence; in the second case existence itself is regarded as sufficiently holy to justify an enormous amount of suffering [...] God on the Cross is a curse upon Life [...]; Dionysos cut into pieces is a promise of Life: it will be forever born anew, and rise afresh from destruction.«[17]

But when Nietzsche describes the type of followers he wanted to have, it is exactly the type of Christians: they should be experienced in suffering, abandonment, sickness, and degradation; they should know profound self-mistrust and have tasted defeat, for only these things could prove today the worth of a man. This statement seems strangely inconsistent with Nietzsche's apology of the classic virtues of pride and self-confidence, physical beauty and strength. It is, however, not so utterly inconsistent if we consider that the worth of humility is in direct proportion to potential pride, for nobody can surrender his will who does not have a will to self-assertion.

The same ambiguity as in Nietzsche's religious temper constitutes the very heart of his moral philosophy. Nietzsche's »Immoralism« is, to use his own words, the mature fruit of »2000 years of moral discipline and self-crucifixion in examining our conscience«. What has really gained the victory over the Christian God is »Christian morality itself, the conception of veracity, taken ever more strictly, the confessional subtlety of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated to [...] intellectual purity at any price. To look upon Nature as if it were a proof of the goodness and care of a God; to interpret History [...] as a constant testimony to a moral order in the world and a moral final

17 *The Will to Power,* paragraph 1052.

purpose; to explain personal experiences [...] as if everything were a dispensation or intimation of providence [...] all that is now past, it has conscience against it [...]. By virtue of this severity, if by anything, we are *good* Europeans.«[18] Thus it is the Christian morality itself which motivates Nietzsche's immoralism, and even in this respect he could refer to Christ himself who went beyond the good and evil of established Jewish morality. Nietzsche's immoralism rests again on a faith, not in God, but in nature, substituting cosmology for theology.

Beyond this inherent ambiguity of Nietzsche's religious temper and moral passion there are passages in his writings which suggest a single-minded recognition of the Christian ideal. His well-known sentence that »There has been only one Christian, and he died on the Cross« can easily be supplemented by similar statements, e.g.: »Christ on the Cross is still the most sublime symbol.« The most striking passage is one in the *Anti-Christ*, an interpretation of Christ which separates him from all historic-dogmatic Christianity (according to Nietzsche an invention of St. Paul), characterizing him with obvious sympathy as a perfect soul the life of which was light and personal truth. Not having been concerned at all with social, political, and cultural interests, he also did not feel the slightest opposition to the »world« in the sense of the later Church. He knew himself as one with his heavenly Father, so he also did not know what sin is. Though Nietzsche's picture of Jesus is not entirely sympathetic, but colored by the same criticism which he applied to certain Christian types of Dostoevsky, it remains nevertheless a stumbling block to every straightforward interpretation of Nietzsche as an Antichrist.

All this together may suggest an interpretation of Nietzsche's Anti-christian Christianity with the emphasis on the second word. The most affirmative of these interpretations is that of a Jesuit, Urs von Balthasar. He does not hesitate to assert that Nietzsche defends Christianity even better than Dostoevsky, and that he penetrates the very secret of Christianity more than anyone else in the nineteenth century, by recognizing the secret of self-sacrifice. Balthasar holds that the anti-christian position of Nietzsche is, to quote from a letter of Nietzsche himself, only the »popular aspect«, while Nietzsche's own passion (in the double sense of this word) is the first and the last fact of his life. Nietzsche realized, as Balthasar says, »faith as an absolute experiment of his own existence«.

18 *The Joyful Wisdom*, paragraph 357.

I would not go so far as Balthasar, and this for two reasons. First, the »existential« definition of faith as the absolute experiment of one's own existence does not imply any commitment to a definite object of faith, to a faith in Christ.

Second, the idea of a vicarious self-sacrifice as such, without qualification, is not specifically Christian. It is common to many non-christian religions. Taken, however, in its Christian meaning, it is incompatible with Nietzsche's idea of sacrifice. For one of his arguments against Christianity is just that it increased so much the value of each individual in his relation to God as to make it impossible to sacrifice with good conscience thousands of individuals for the sake of the human race. But the race, says Nietzsche, can only exist by such sacrifices (*Menschenopfer*). On the Christian assumption, only *self*-sacrifice is allowed, but this »remnant of sacrifice« has no value at all from the viewpoint of the total discipline and improvement of the race (*Gesamtzüchtung*). I would, however, admit that in our time the rediscovery of Christianity might be more convincingly achieved by men who went through the most radical negation than by professional Christians. Following a parable of St. Paul, one might say that Nietzsche, like the gentiles formerly, could become a wild olive branch grafted into the old Jewish-Christian tree the natural branches of which were broken off by their unbelief.

But the situation is much more complicated today than at the time of the Jewish apostle of the Christian gospel to the gentiles. The trouble of contemporary Christianity is that there is no genuine paganism, neither in Europe nor in America, against which Christianity could once more become what it was. Since our world is nominally Christian and actually secularized, one has »to introduce Christianity into Christendom«, to use a phrase of Kierkegaard. This is, however, much more difficult than to introduce it into paganism. The problem of a decision either for or against Christianity is now involved in ambiguity. But how then decide, as Nietzsche suggests, between Dionysos and Christ? Has Nietzsche any genuine access to the world of the Greeks? Or is he perhaps less »pagan« than Goethe and Hölderlin to whom Christ and Dionysos were two divine brothers? I venture to say he is, and this for two main reasons: first, by being entirely preoccupied with the *future* of man's destiny, and second, by his *will* to the ancient cosmos of eternal recurrence.

To explain the first point: no Greek was primarily concerned with

the distant future of man's destiny. Future was to them predetermined by fate and therefore subject to divination. All their mythologies, genealogies, and histories re-presented to them their past. There is not a single serious reflection upon the future prospects of history, either in Herodotus, or in Thucydides, or Polybius. All of them took the supreme law of the cosmos, i.e., the law of growth and decay, for granted. Whatever will happen will be of the same pattern as the present and past events. The perversion of the classical historical consciousness into our modern, anticipating one is in the last analysis due to the Jewish-Christian outlook on history which is based on faith as hope and expectation, and thereby directed towards the future, either defined by a definite *eschaton* or by an indefinite idea of progress. It was Christianity in the line of the prophets which opened this new dimension of anxiety and hope, of dynamic and progressive thinking, and revolutionary action into the future. Little has changed in this respect between Isaiah on the one side, and Marx, Kierkegaard, Donoso Cortes, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche on the other side, between the old and the new prophets. For alle of them are terribly concerned with the history of the future and with the past only under this perspective, namely, as a promise to it. Hence, they pass judgment upon their present. Even to Nietzsche the present and the past are only a necessary prerequisite to a future goal. Zarathustra the victor over God and Nothingness, is the »redeeming man of the Future«. Nietsche's whole philosophy is one great »Prelude of a philosophy of the Future« as he called *Beyond Good and Evil.* As a prelude to a distant but definite future Nietzsche's philosophy is a secularized and again desecularized eschatology. All this is entirely un-Greek, not classic, not pagan, but derived from the Jewish-Christian tradition.

To explain the second point: Nietzsche's philosophy is also entirely un-Greek by his effort to will the cyclic cosmos which is beyond will and purpose. The Greeks were impressed by the visible order and beauty of the cosmos, and the cyclic movements of the heavenly spheres were to them divine. The view of the eternal recurrence of generation and corruption was to them satisfactory because of being a rational interpretation of the universe which combines the recognition of temporal changes with periodic regularity, constancy, and immutability. In the intellectual climate of the Greeks there was no room for the unique, incomparable historic event – neither for Christ nor for the year one of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo.* Their view of the world was to them conveyed

not by a transcendent faith but by sensual perception and reasoned conclusion. It was a sensible world.

The same view of eternal recurrences is to Nietzsche »the most frightful« conception and »the heaviest burden«[19]. Why is it a burden? Because it bears upon his will. The belief that everything will return in an aimless circle is indeed frightful if set over against a purposeful will which is always a will to a new future. Thus Nietzsche was unable to develop his vision like the Greeks as a supreme and objective order, but introduced it as a subjective ethical imperative: to live »as if« everything would return, in order to impress on each action the weight of an inescapable responsibility for the future. The theory of the eternal recurrence becomes to him an ethical device and »hammer«, substituting that sense of responsibility which was alive in Christianity as long as man lived in the presence of God and in the expectation of a last judgment.

But since the will does not move in a circle but in a straight and irreversible direction, the crucial problem of Zarathustra becomes »the redemption« of the will from its own one-dimensional structure. Yet how can the will integrate itself with the cyclic law of the cosmos where every movement of advance is at the same time a movement of return? Nietzsche's answer is: the will must redeem itself from itself by willing also backward, i.e., by accepting voluntarily what it did not will, the whole past of all that is already done and existent, in particular the fact of our own existence which nobody has produced by his will[20]. All this is entirely un-Greek, not classic, not pagan, but derived from the Jewish-Christian tradition, in particular from the belief that world and man are created by God's purposeful will. Even in Nietzsche's godless philosophy nothing is more conspicuous than the emphasis on being creative and willing, creative by willing. To the Greeks human creativeness was an »imitation of Nature«.

Genuine paganism of classical antiquity is indeed gone and not to be revived. Not only our outlook on the future (beyond »the duration« and toward a »better world«) and our reliance upon the power of the will, but also our moralized attitude to those powers of nature which are manifested in sexual procreation and its organs, make classic pa-

19 *The Joyful Wisdom*, paragraph 341.

20 See my book on *Nietzsche's Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (Berlin 1935), in diesem Band S. 101 ff.

ganism a beautiful dream. It is pathetic to think that a man like Nietzsche glorified the innocence and holiness of procreation as the triumphant Yea to the eternal recurrence of life[21]. Only occasionally did Nietzsche realize that what separates us forever from the ancient culture is that its religious and social foundations, in *mythos* and *polis,* are completely gone, and that our only access to it is by the »rainbow of concepts«. Actually the classic culture has only survived insofar as it has been assimilated on Roman soil by the Christian Church. Compared with puritan New England, Catholic Italy is a pagan country; Rome, where almost every Christian church is built in and upon a pagan temple, demonstrates this assimilation most strikingly. It is all a »*Santa Maria sopra Minerva*«. This material and spiritual synthesis of Christianity and antiquity was broken up by Luther, a man as great as he was unintellectual. The Reformation alienated us from antiquity by rediscovering the old contradiction of Christianity and paganism. In his protest against the medieval synthesis of Christian faith and Greek philosophy, Luther took St. Paul without his Hellenism and Augustine without his Platonism. But what else is Nietzsche's decision between Christ and Dionysos than a last consequence of Luther's separation between the two great sources of European civilization, in spite of his understanding of the Reformation as a destructive revolt against Western tradition? He could not help remaining a Lutheran Protestant and a classical philologist, profoundly impressed by and longing for, the ancient world in its unmixed purity. One of the most moving words in Nietzsche's last letter to Burckhardt, written shortly after the onset of insanity, is his confession of gratitude for the *ancient* world »for which, however, men of today are not simple and quiet enough«[22].

Except for those who still feel at home in the scholastic synthesis of Aristotle and Augustine or in the humanistic equilibrium of »Homer and the Bible«, Nietzsche's problem of a decision between Christianity and antiquity remains decisive. Just because we are still living on the capital of both it is indeed a crucial question whether the world is eternal or created, whether it is a circle or under the *Cross,* whether it is moving in cycles or toward an *eschaton,* whether man is included in nature or elevated above it by being created in the image of an unnatural God. This alternative does not, however, mean that both ways

21 *The Twilight of the Idols,* p. 118 f.
22 See also *The Will to Power,* paragraph 419.

of thinking are merely historical »interpretations« and on the same level. The Christian view of the world is first of all not a »view« but a matter of faith in things invisible, and the world of eternal recurrences is neither a prejudice of the Greeks nor an invention of Nietzsche but an abiding truth, as true and natural as the eternal recurrence of generation and corruption, of summer and winter, of sunrise and sunset. The question is only if that is the whole truth[23].

23 Schelling, *The Ages of the World* (New York 1942), p. 119 and p. 153.